



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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Testimony Opposing Senate Bill No. 379

AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill No. 379, An Act Concerning Vocational-Technical Schools.

Governor Rell and the General Assembly are facing incredible challenges posed by the global recession. As we all try to solve the problems created by the recession, it appears that many legislative committees are proposing procedural changes to protect particular areas in the budget. The problems we are facing, however, are severe fiscal problems and not process problems. If each subject matter committee of the General Assembly attempts to change the processes for of their respective subject areas, the real problems facing the state, which are financial, will be overlooked. In these tough economic times, the most sensible course of action would be address the state's fiscal problems; it is not prudent to suggest process changes which would limit the ability of the state to marshal, control and conserve state resources.

Speaking specifically about this bill, it would make many significant changes to the statutes guiding Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) operations. These changes are unnecessary and they would create significant administrative burdens to the State Department of Education, the Office of Policy and Management, the Office of Workforce Competitiveness and the Department of Labor, in a climate when agencies are already struggling to provide their current services with limited resources and personnel. We cannot endorse this bill.

Section 2 would require that two members of the eleven member State Board of Education have industrial, trade or technical school experience. In concert with the change, Section 3 eliminates the state-wide advisory committee on the technical high school system, which includes representatives who have industrial, trade or technical school experience. Instead of a committee with real-life trade experience, the bill would establish a bureaucratic system of identifying workforce needs, ensuring the curriculum includes the skills identified as needed

in the workforce and assessing the adequacy of the resources available to the technical high school system. If the intent of this bill is to provide more input into decision-making by those familiar with industrial, trade or technical school experience, the elimination of the advisory committee will have the opposite effect. Rather than having an advisory committee of 19 members who have relevant trade experience, the State Board of Education would be limited to two people with industrial, trade or technical school experience.

Section 4 of this bill would alter the executive power of the State Bond Commission and require automatic twice yearly bond allocations of at least \$2 million each for "general maintenance and trade and capital equipment" for the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS). Additionally, this bill would essentially allow the inclusion of these funds on the Bond Commission agenda without proper review, oversight and regardless of need. Finally, CTHSS is already the beneficiary of the largess of the General Assembly's school building priority list process which contributes to the ever growing bond allocations for school construction, over which the executive branch and the State Bond Commission have limited control. This process has committed almost \$950 million to CTHSS with nearly half already spent.

Section 6 would require that on or after July 1, 2010, the State Board of Education replace any school bus that is over ten years old. This is a potentially costly and unnecessary requirement because many school buses have a useful and safe life after ten years and should not be replaced arbitrarily. This section would also require the CTHSS superintendant to submit a report on the replacement of school buses in FY 2011 and a projection of the number of school buses anticipated to be replaced in FY 2012. On a recent Bond Commission agenda, Governor Rell included \$2 million to purchase 40 new school buses.

Section 7 would require that starting with FY 2011, the CTHSS be a separate budgeted agency from the Department of Education. This would cost the state additional money since there is some economy of scale within the Department as currently configured. Additional employees would need to be hired since payroll and human resources are an integrated part of the State Department of Education administration. If the goal of this bill is to provide more transparency as to the cost of the CTHSS, that can be accommodated within the existing structure. This bill would make more than just a budgeting change because the structure of the existing State Board of Education is responsible for statewide education as well as the operation of the CTHSS. It is not necessary to establish another agency in order for SDE to provide better information.

I would like to again thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony. I respectfully request the Committee to oppose this bill. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.